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ABSTRACT

The barriers to upward mobility faced by female administrators working in American and International Overseas Schools and how these women perceived selected barriers were studied. The sample consisted of 67 women, mainly principals, directors, or superintendents, in administrative positions in International Schools in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. These women were attending the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Association for the Advancement of International Education in Atlanta (Georgia). The 67 respondents represent 30% of the population of female administrators in the International Schools. These respondents identified professional development and training needs to help them overcome barriers such as the lack of a network of contacts or the fear of seeming unfeminine in confronting conflict assertively. Respondents were agreed on the importance of mentors for women. The responses also stressed the importance of a strong self-concept in resisting oppression. Respondents perceived that women did not bring psychological turmoil to the job. Geographic location did not appear to have a significant influence on the participants' perceptions of barriers to upward mobility. However, respondents employed in Asia agreed more strongly with the statement that the greatest barrier for women is role prejudice than did respondents from other parts of the world. Recommendations for improving the upward mobility of women center on a structured mentoring component, programs aimed at developing on-the-job training, and providing opportunities for female administrators to meet to discuss issues. (Contains 51 references.) (SLD)

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Barriers to Upward Mobility in International Schools for Women Administrators

by

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Introduction

Throughout history women have been discriminated against in the field of education as well as in other sectors of society (Marshall & Kasten, 1994). The discrimination against women in education has been coupled with constant reform movements during the past 30 years. Educational administration is in the midst of exciting challenges, with new models for leadership and new policies supporting the inclusion of teachers in decision making (Murray & Simmons, 1994). Women have historically had the fewest employment opportunities in the area of K-12 educational administration (Restine, 1993).

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine the barriers to upward mobility faced by female administrators working in American and International Overseas Schools and how these women perceived selected barriers. The sample consisted of 67 women employed in administrative positions in International Schools in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Included in the sample were women administrators in attendance at the 1997 annual Association for the Advancement of International Educators conference in Atlanta, Georgia. These administrators typically held the title of principal, director, or superintendent. The framework utilized included replication of an earlier study of female administrators in Alabama (Crutcher, 1992).

Statement of Research Questions

The study set out to answer four research questions. These included the following:

1. What barriers to upward mobility do female administrators perceive in American and International Overseas Schools?
2. Are there significant differences in the perceived barriers identified by female administrators in American and International Overseas Schools based on geographic location?
3. What are the perceived differences in mobility patterns for female administrators based on institutional and demographic variables (career progression and method of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure)?
4. What are considered to be the most urgent professional development and training needs for female administrators working in American and International Overseas Schools?

Significance of the Study

The need to increase the awareness of barriers which contribute to the low incidence of women administrators is vital in achieving gender equity in administrative positions in American and International Overseas Schools. As Regan and Brooks (1995) asserted, women's experience as school leaders has value, and the knowledge constructed from this experience should be disseminated to men and women alike. The current study attempted to provide the following:

1. Important information that could be used to develop and plan in-service training in the personnel recruitment and selection of American and International Overseas School administrators.
2. Gender values which would enable women to overcome barriers and help dismantle barriers that presently exist.
3. A framework for scholars studying gender disparity in educational administration.

Margaret Mead believed that the ideal culture is one in which there is a place for every human gift. By Mead's standards, the contemporary culture is far from ideal for women, as many gifts are unused and unappreciated (Pipher, 1994). The French author Stendahl wrote, "All geniuses born women are lost to the public good" (Cited in Pipher, p. 22). Many women who aspire to be educational administrators are lost to the public good due to the barriers that they encounter (Gilligan, 1993); the intent of this study was to examine some of those barriers.

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework of the Study

MacGregor and Touchton (1995) discussed the identification of gender differences with respect to the language used to describe power structures in educational settings. In addition to power perspectives, findings from previous studies have included gender viewpoints on empowerment, accountability, responsibility and resources (Acker-Hocevar, Touchton, & Zenz, 1995). Brunner (1993), in her study of a highly successful superintendent, concluded that females who wish to access power circuits needed to be culturally bilingual, i.e. they needed to "speak the language of those in the male circuits of power while remaining feminine" (p. 198). Thus, certain barriers exist which prevent female administrators from having access to upward mobility.

Brief Review of the Literature

Gender Issues

An issue of continued interest and concern for those who work in educational administration is that of the dearth of women employed in leadership positions in educational settings (Bagenstos, 1987; Edson, 1988; Hallinger & Murphy, 1991; Luebkemann & Clemens, 1994; Marietti & Stout, 1994; Mertz & McNeely, 1990; Mitchell, 1993; Montenegro, 1993; North, 1991; Pavan, 1989; Shakeshaft, 1989; Wesson & Grady, 1994). There is a need for well-qualified women candidates who are ready and willing to pursue administrative opportunities in the educational arena at all levels (Schmitt, 1995). As educational institutions make efforts to address this need, questions arise, such as the identification of elements which comprise preparation programs for prospective female administrators.

During the first century and a half of the history of the U.S., little attention was given to the education of women either in theory or in practice (Woody, 1966). Although teaching was identified in the 20th century as a female profession, teachers have not always

been women. Records have indicated that in the late 18th century, all teaching was done by men (Shakeshaft, 1989).

The percentage of school superintendents who are women has been gradually increasing, because of affirmative action efforts including the passage of Title IX in 1972 and the Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Pavan et al, 1996). Nevertheless, graduate degree attainment by women does not necessarily guarantee proportionate representation in administrative positions in education. By 1990 women earned 59% of the master's degrees and 51% of the doctoral degrees in educational administration (Snyder, 1993). National data compiled by Glass (1992) illustrated that 6.4% of the public school system superintendents nationwide were women. The lack of female school administrators cannot be blamed on women's unwillingness to get the needed credentials or to make extensive job search efforts (Pavan, 1988; 1989).

According to Schuster (1993), the lives of women have been affected significantly by gender role socialization and gender discrimination. Her studies revealed that a consciousness of the struggle for gender equity has shaped the expectations and influenced the well-being of educated American women. Schuster's studies suggested that even young women still feel somewhat limited in their choices and perhaps even disenfranchised by a society that does not provide structures for women to comfortably sustain multiple career and family roles during early adult years.

Openness and willingness for self-examination, and a lifelong commitment toward personal mastery are critical for anyone who takes up the challenge of being an educational administrator (Carrow-Moffett, 1993). With the advent of any change, individuals are required to learn something new and "unlearn" something old; it is the unlearning process that is at the root of most resistance to change (Schein, 1969). To become effective educational administrators, educators most first challenge themselves to explore and develop their awareness of the barriers and enhancers that they bring to the educational process (Carrow-Moffett, 1993).

International Schools and International Education

The total number of American and International schools worldwide is 557 (International Schools Services, 1995). The history of "international schools" and of "international education" is in each case a relatively recent one in formal terms, with the last 50 years having seen particularly rapid developments resulting in substantial diversity with respect to both areas (Hayden & Thompson, 1995). In many cases international schools and international education are clearly linked in the perception of those responsible for education provision, and in the expectations of many parents subscribing to such institutions. Matthews (1989), in discussing the nature of international schools, made only a small number of references to their relationship to international education and no attempt to define the latter. Belle-Isle (1986) challenged the assumption that international education is de facto what takes place in international schools. Gellar (1981) pointed out that as the number of "overseas" schools worldwide grew, for want of a better one, the term

"International Education" gained currency. Cole-Baker (in Hill 1994) believed that both international and national schools may offer an international education, which he saw as a being essentially about intercultural understanding.

A major role of the administrator in overseas schools falls into the realm of "public relations," but does not entail "selling" the school to its American customers (Allen, 1990). Instead, the focus is on selling America to the citizens of the host country. Depending on the part of the world in which the school is located, the selling job can be either frustrating or personally satisfying, with the odds leaning heavily toward the latter (Allen, 1990).

Asbury (1993) conducted a study to examine recent trends in Alabama public schools regarding the qualifying and hiring of females for secondary school principalships. The results of Asbury's study revealed that females perceived a significantly higher degree of discrimination in the hiring practices of their districts than did their male counterparts. According to Asbury, the top three inhibiting factors listed by females for not holding secondary principalships were lack of interest, belief that male supervisors think that females should not hold secondary principalships, and lack of experience in leadership activities. Based on the findings of his study, Asbury recommended that further research of this nature be conducted on a regional and national basis to determine trends at those levels. With further study on both a national and an international basis, perhaps the cultural influences on institutional behavior could be determined.

Jankowicz (1994) stressed the limitations and dangers of an oversimplified model of cultural change processes. The origins of the concept of experiential learning and teaching have been traced to the work of John Dewey in the middle of this century, and later to the student centered philosophy of Carl Rogers. More specifically, the founder is usually thought of as being David Kolb, who in 1974 produced his "Cycle of Learning." This has been adapted and developed by Roberts and Woodhead (1995) in their training course for effective school administration in Lithuania. Burnard (1988) produced a means of demonstrating how practical experience can be used as the basis for planning theoretical blocks of study.

Methodology

Sample

The population studied was identified as women administrators employed by American and International Overseas Schools located outside of the United States and Canada. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), educational researchers rarely can investigate the entire population of individuals who interest them. Instead, they must select a sample of individuals to study. A properly executed sample survey can measure individual views in a representative way (Fowler, 1974). The sample for this study was comprised of women administrators attending the annual meeting of the 1997 Association for the Advancement of International Education in Atlanta, Georgia. The sample was selected on the basis of the willingness of participants to respond to the survey. An

additional mailing of surveys was done to all women administrators in American and International Schools listed in the International Schools Service and Association for the Advancement of International Education directories. Where applicable, surveys were sent via surface or air mail, e-mail, or facsimile transmission.

Design

The research paradigm selected for use in this study was survey research. Babbie (1973) reported that "survey data facilitate the careful implementation of logical understanding" (p. 46). According to Settle and Alreck (1986), perceptions are what really count; they facilitate the discovery of trends and the prediction of where things are going in the next few years. Thus, the survey was designed with the intent of measuring female administrators' perceptions of barriers to upward mobility for women working in American and International Overseas Schools. Additionally, an open-ended question was incorporated into the instrument as a result of McCormack's (1995) finding that open-ended questions enhance questionnaire responses.

Descriptive statistics are mathematical techniques for organizing and summarizing a set of numerical data (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The design of this study was to provide empirical evidence to test the validity of perceptions of barriers to upward mobility faced by women administrators employed in American and International Overseas Schools. Findings based on data collected from the sample are generalized only to that population (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Thus, the generalization of knowledge claims indicated by this study beyond the defined population will be considered speculative until supported by evidence from new studies involving other populations.

Instrumentation

The Likert-type method of summated ratings, as described in Research in Education by John W. Best and James V. Kahn (1989) was chosen to measure the perceptions of the subjects on a questionnaire. The Likert-type method was used as a response mode to measure the perceived values each respondent assigned to individual barrier statements listed on the instrument. The items of the questionnaire were developed by selecting those barriers which had the highest frequency in related literature.

The questionnaire was designed to determine the perceptions of female administrators regarding the barriers affecting the upward mobility of women administrators in International Schools. In a pilot study (Berman, 1996), the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the total instrument was 0.91, and this evidence strongly supported the reliability of the instrument as a whole. Factor analysis and item-to-total correlations have been presented as evidence of construct validity only. Both reliability and validity provide evidence of strong psychometric properties (Gregory, 1996).

The structure of factor analysis loaded the items into four factors: support systems barriers, social barriers, self-imposed barriers, and cultural barriers. The first two factors, support systems and social barriers, had Cronbach coefficient alphas of 0.92 and 0.83 respectively. Both of these conveyed strong reliability for these factors. Factors 3 and 4, self-imposed barriers and cultural barriers, had Cronbach coefficient alphas of less than 0.70, which is reasonable for small samples (Mickler, Chissom, & McLean, 1989).

Results

Data Collection

A total of 230 surveys were distributed via mail, e-mail, fax, and at the annual women administrators' breakfast meeting at the 1997 Association for the Advancement of International Education in Atlanta, Georgia. A total of 146 responses were received, comprising a response rate of 63%. Of the responses, 67 were usable, which accounts for 30% of the population of female administrators in international schools, and 46% of the respondents. The reminder notifications were sent via e-mail as a follow-up to the original distribution of surveys. The differences in the number of surveys received and the number of surveys used in the analysis can be accounted for by a strict adherence to criteria regarding the respondents. In order for a survey to be considered usable, the respondent had to be female, employed in an administrative position in an international school, and living outside of the United States. If the respondent did not meet all three requirements, the survey was considered unusable.

The instrument contained 7 demographic items, 40 barrier statements followed by a choice of 5 possible responses, and an open-ended question. Participants' responses to the barrier statements were scored on a 5-point modified Likert-type scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Data Analysis

In order to answer the first research question concerning the barriers to upward mobility faced by female administrators in American and International Overseas Schools, responses to survey questions 1-40 in Section II of the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of mean, median, and mode in descending order. Higher levels of agreement indicated a more frequent occurrence of a barrier.

The statements with which the respondents most frequently agreed were: mentors can help women's careers by giving their protegees career direction, support, career aspiration and by assisting with career change (Mean 4.409, Standard Deviation .607); the key to resisting oppression is a strong self-concept (Mean 4.154, Standard Deviation .795); women build self-esteem and confidence by associating with the mentor (Mean 4.030), Standard Deviation .859); women frequently do not receive salary, title, and status to match responsibilities (Mean 3.923, Standard Deviation 1.122); and beliefs that male

administrators best handle certain kinds of positions are restrictive (Mean 3.848, Standard Deviation .949).

The statements with which the respondents had the strongest degree of disagreement were: women bring psychological turmoil to the job (Mean 1.697, Standard Deviation .877); women find psychological separation and alienation from the rest of the group too much to bear (Mean 2.242, Standard Deviation 1.039); women have the educational preparation but lack the necessary experience to hold administrative positions (Mean 2.379, Standard Deviation 1.092); faculty members treat male administrators more professionally than female administrators (Mean 2.470, Standard Deviation 1.166); and male co-workers extend a lack of professionalism to women (Mean 2.470, Standard Deviation 1.056).

The second research question concerned differences in the barriers identified by female administrators in American and International Overseas Schools based on geographic location. In order to answer this question, the responses to Item 1 in Section I of the survey were included in the Analysis of Variance on all items in Section II. The Type I error rate was maintained at a pre-established alpha level of .05 for the entire set of comparisons.

The respondents employed in schools in Asia agreed more strongly with the statement concerning the greatest barrier for women as being role prejudice than did the respondents employed in schools in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East (F probability of .0352). There were no other statistically significant differences among the respondents based on country of employment for the other barrier statements.

The third research question pertained to the differnces in mobility patterns for female administrators based on the following institutional and demographic variables: career progression and method of promotion; job title; gender of supervisor; and length of tenure. In order to answer this question, data were analyzed for items 1-40 on Section II and in Section I items 4-6 (career progression and method of promotion), item 2 (job title), item 7 (gender of supervisor), and item 3 (length of tenure). For the comparison, the one-way Analysis of Variance procedure was used.

The participants who had been promoted from outside the school responded with a significantly higher (Tukey-HSD test with significance level .050) level of agreement than did their counterparts who had been promoted from within the school on four items. First, the respondents promoted from outside the school maintained a higher level of agreement (Mean 4.0435) with the statement concerning the notion that women experience external barriers to promotion despite the declaration of equal opportunity employment than did the respondents who had been promoted from within the school (Mean 3.4250). Second, the respondents promoted from outside the school maintained a signficantly higher level of agreement (Mean 4.1304) with the item related to the idea that women often spend the early part of their marriages promoting their husbands' careers than did the group promoted from within the school (Mean 3.1538). Third, the respondents promoted from outside the

school had a significantly higher level of agreement with the statement positing that school counselors fail to identify future positions in administration as desirable to females (Mean 3.4783) than did the participants promoted from within the school (Mean 2.79). Finally, the respondents promoted from outside the school had a significantly higher level of agreement with the statement concerning the idea that the key to resisting oppression is a strong self-concept (Mean 4.4783) than did the respondents promoted from within the school (Mean 3.9744).

The present position title of the respondents did not significantly influence their responses. There were no significant differences among the respondents on any of the items based on their present position title.

The item asking if women should be allowed to progress by cooperation more than competition received a stronger degree of disagreement from the respondents whose previous positions had been as coordinators and department chairs (Mean 2.8571) and counselors (Mean 1.333) than did the respondents whose previous positions had been teachers (Mean 3.2703), teaching principals (Mean 4.000), non-school related (Mean 3.7500), and other administrative positions (Mean 3.3636).

The respondents whose immediate supervisor was male had a significantly higher level of agreement with the item stating that belief systems create barriers for career advancement for women (Mean 3.5714) than the respondents whose immediate supervisor was female (Mean 2.5556).

The item stating that women should be allowed to progress by cooperation more than competition received a significantly higher agreement response from the participants employed in their present position for 6-10 years (mean 3.5333) and those employed in their present position for 11-15 years (Mean 3.6250) than it did from the participants employed in their position from 0-5 years (mean 3.1026) and those employed in their present position for 16 years or more (Mean 1.5000).

The answer to the question regarding the most urgent professional development and training needs for female administrators working in American and International Overseas Schools came from responses to an open-ended question at the end of the survey. Information from this open-ended question offered data that might not have been found in the responses to the survey items.

The professional development and training needs described by the respondents included the following: on-the-job training; mentoring; having opportunities to meet with other administrators to discuss issues; leadership training; and developing self-confidence.

Conclusions

First, the professional development and training needs for female administrators working in American and International Overseas Schools identified by the respondents

were consistent with their level of agreement with the barrier statements on the survey. The statement which received the highest mean score was the following: mentors can help women's careers by giving their protegees career direction, support, career aspiration and by assisting with career change. In addition, by responding to an open-ended question regarding professional development and training needs, the respondents discussed the importance of mentoring for female administrators in international schools with greater frequency than any other item.

The second conclusion inferred from the results of the analysis in this study was the importance of a strong self-concept in resisting oppression. The statement with which the respondents had the second highest mean was that the key to resisting oppression is a strong self-concept.

The next conclusion revealed from the results of the study was that the respondents perceived that women do not bring psychological turmoil to the job. The statement with which the respondents had the strongest degree of disagreement was that women bring psychological turmoil to the job. The fact that the aforementioned statement was the only statement on the survey with which the respondents tended to strongly disagree is significant.

The fourth conclusion drawn from the results of the study was that geographic location did not appear to have a significant influence on the participants' perceptions of barriers to upward mobility. The respondents employed in schools in Asia agreed much more strongly with the statement concerning the greatest barrier for women as being role prejudice than did the respondents employed in schools in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. There were no other statistically significant differences among the respondents based on country of employment for the other barrier statements.

The final conclusion drawn from the results of the study is that only one of the most frequently reported barriers to upward mobility for the respondents was consistent with Crutcher's (1992) findings from her examination of the barriers which affected the upward mobility of women administrators in the State of Alabama. Crutcher concluded that the most frequently reported barriers to upward mobility for all categories of female principals in her study were as follows:

1. Women believe that they will be considered unfeminine if they confront conflict assertively.
2. A major barrier to a woman's career is her need to give primary attention to her family until the youngest child is in school.
3. Women do not have a "good-old-girl" network.
4. Women find psychological separation and alienation from the rest of the group difficult to experience.
5. Women build self-esteem and confidence by associating with a mentor.

Recommendations

For Practice

The first proposal offered is to incorporate a structured mentoring component in American and International Overseas Schools for female administrators. Regardless of geographic location, career progression, method of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure, the results indicated agreement among the participants that mentors can help women's careers by giving their protegees career direction, support, career aspiration and by assisting with career change, and that women build self-esteem and confidence by associating with the mentor.

Secondly, programs aimed at developing on-the-job training practices for female administrators in international schools would benefit from a strong experiential component. In order to cultivate the qualities of effective leadership, women administrators must be challenged to behave in ways beyond the bounds of the conventions of academia when women are obtaining degrees and certification in educational administration, and when women are working in the international school setting, where they do not traditionally have the same opportunities and levels of decision-making that men do. Only then will the experience of working in an international school serve females who aspire to senior-level administrative positions (i.e. directors, superintendents, etc.) to develop and try the leadership skills necessary for their future career development. The high standards expected of international school administrators would then be judged on a more equitable basis according to specific actions of men and women alike.

The final recommendation regarding improvements in future practices would be to have opportunities to meet with other administrators to discuss issues. This would ensure that female administrators are able to utilize the experience and expertise of their peers to develop as professionals. An ongoing discussion, both through technological assistance and in person, forms a foundation for mentoring, leadership development, and professional and personal development.

For Further Study

The first recommendation for future research is to appraise the development of leadership potential of women administrators in international schools over a long time period. Longitudinal studies aimed at assessing how female administrators' perceptions of barriers to upward mobility in international schools may develop or change during a four-year period of time, for example, would greatly add to the existing body of knowledge.

The next recommendation is to investigate whether any relationships or correlations exist between different types of women administrators in international schools relative to their success in moving upward in their professional careers. The results of this study found that female administrators working in international schools in Asia tended to have a significantly higher level of agreement with the item stating that role prejudice is the

greatest barrier faced by women than the participants working in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Ascertaining whether this perception affects the upward mobility of women in that particular region would expand existing insights into the characteristics of female administrators.

The third recommendation is to investigate the level of development of perceptions of barriers to upward mobility among female administrators in international schools occupying top-level positions, those occupying entry-level administrative positions (i.e. assistant principals), and those in non-administrative positions. No effort was made in this study to distinguish between female administrators and non-administrators in international schools.

The final recommendation is to investigate the variables above and beyond formal instruction responsible for contributing to the advancement and upward mobility of women in educational careers. Are there other quality indicators that can be used to assess the perceptions of barriers to upward mobility by female administrators in international schools? The results of this study indicated a significant difference between the perceptions of barriers by participants who had been promoted from outside the school and those who had been promoted from within the school.

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